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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KIGALI 000496

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DEPT FOR AF/FO, AF/C, AND DRL
MCC FOR SHERRI KRAHAM AND MATT MCLEAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KMCA](#) [RW](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY FRAZER'S ROUNDTABLE WITH
RWANDAN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Classified By: Amb. Arietti for reasons 1.4(b),(d).

11. (SBU) Summary. During a roundtable discussion April 5 with Rwandan parliamentarians and a separate call on the president of the Rwandan Senate, Assistant Secretary Frazer addressed recent developments in the Great Lakes region, human rights issues, the role of parliament in Rwandan society, and the pace of reconciliation in the country. The parliamentarians expressed gratitude for Dr. Frazer's interest in the FDLR issue, which they suggested has been overlooked by the international community. The A/S noted the importance not only of the international community and Congolese government putting pressure on the FDLR to leave the Congo, but also of the GOR creating positive conditions in country that would serve as a pull factor in bringing the fighters home. The parliamentarians strongly defended Rwanda's human rights record, arguing that complaints by former government officials overseas are intended to ensure themselves a comfortable life of exile rather than the result of a genuine fear of persecution in Rwanda. End summary.

Regional Stability

12. (SBU) A/S Frazer opened her call on Senate President Dr. Vincent Biruta with a discussion of lingering regional instability, notably the continued presence of the FDLR in the DRC. The A/S noted the importance of putting into place both push and pull factors to encourage FDLR fighters to leave the Congo and return to Rwanda: they should feel that they can return to a better life in Rwanda and be confident that they will have the space necessary to exercise their political rights. Biruta welcomed A/S Frazer's interest in the FDLR, noting that Rwandans have the impression that the FDLR issue is being forgotten by the international community. With reference to political space, Biruta commented that as long as Rwanda's laws are followed, FDLR members are free to establish a political party or join an existing one after they return to the country: they could not, however, be allowed to form a political party outside the country. A/S Frazer noted that while parties can be formed anywhere, they need to be registered in their home country.

13. (SBU) During the roundtable discussion with parliamentarians representing a cross-section of political parties, MP Gideon Kayinamura (RPF), who hails from northwest Rwanda, along the Congolese border, noted that there is more trade between western Rwanda and the Congo than there is between western Rwanda and Kigali. Relations

between the two countries have improved tremendously, he said, adding that non-state actors can be dealt with effectively within the framework of the joint verification mechanism in place. Noting historic, economic, and ethnic ties among Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC, Kayinamura called for revival of the Economic Community of Great Lakes States (CEPGL) so that economic development can contribute to regional stability. Noting that he himself is an agro-businessman, Kayinamura claimed that the ex-FDLR combatants who returned to his region of Rwanda are the happiest workers because life in Rwanda is so much better than the life they experienced in Congo.

¶4. (C) Senator Joseph Karemera (RPF) expressed concern that the international community is not doing enough to encourage the FDLR to return to Rwanda. Noting that no ex-combatant has ever returned to the Congo, Karemera wondered why this fact is not publicized more widely. A/S Frazer noted that she frequently heard during her conversations in the DRC that the FDLR had two concerns about their return to Rwanda. First, senior FDLR members may be seeking amnesty in Rwanda (the USG, she noted, does not have a position on the issue). Second, the FDLR might be concerned about being able to operate as a political entity in Rwanda. This concern, the A/S noted, was raised especially in conversations with MONUC officials.

¶5. (SBU) Karemera suggested that conditions in Rwanda must be measured against the progress of reconciliation. For example, the recent release of 40,000 prisoners (charged with lesser crimes committed during the genocide) is a huge incentive for FDLR fighters to return to Rwanda but it was a tense issue domestically that had to be dealt with carefully. Genocide survivors, he said, are now accusing the GOR of granting amnesty to genocidaires.

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Defending Rwanda,s Human Rights Record

¶6. (SBU) A query by A/S Frazer about the state of human rights in Rwanda sparked an animated defense of the political climate in Rwanda. Senator Joseph Karemera argued that the political environment in Rwanda is quite open: there are 11 political parties operating in the country, seven of which are represented in parliament; there have never been fewer Rwandan refugees in the country,s history; none of Rwanda,s 13 newspapers face harassment from the government; and the human rights abuses that do occur cannot be said to be institutionalized. Additionally, he noted, ex-combatants comprise 60 percent of the RDF. Karemera argued that Rwanda,s genocide resulted from the denial of rights to a certain segment of society; the 2003 constitution seeks to avoid a repeat of that situation by preventing a winner-take-all system. Hence the Forum of Political Parties, which was created to avoid friction, to permit decision by consensus, and to provide assistance to parties bedeviled by internal strife. Senator Odette Nyiramilimo (PL) added that the Rwandan culture of ceding the floor to one,s elder, sometimes taken as a lack of freedom, already is changing with the advent of new newspapers and radio stations. It is the first time, she said, that Rwandans of her generation (born in the 1950s under a monarchy) have lived with such freedoms.

¶7. (SBU) Returning to the issue of human rights, the A/S noted that many in the international community have the perception that Rwanda is not as free as it could be and that two factors contributing to that perception are the criminal charges against former President Bizimungu and irregularities observed during the 2003 elections. Concerning Bizimungu,s case, the parliamentarians noted: 1) that he was charged with violating a law he himself

created, and 2) that he was brought to trial faster than the cases being heard (by the ICTR) in Arusha. Karemera stressed that Bizimungu had been trying to mobilize people along ethnic lines by stating that genocide would happen in Rwanda again. Ambassador Arietti noted that other than embezzlement, all of the charges against Bizimungu stem from criminal association laws; the division between criminal and political association is difficult to identify. Assistant Secretary Frazer added that as Rwanda's institutions mature and as society is better able to cope with internal divisions, it will be important that they be given more leeway and greater opportunity for freedom of expression.

¶8. (SBU) With respect to the former MDR party, which was criticized in a 2002 parliamentary report which called for it to be banned, Karemera recalled that since 1994 the MDR had always been a part of the government coalition, not in opposition. It had been beset by serious internal divisions, which led to its breakup. Many MDR members then joined other parties and remain active in political life. The current Prime Minister, for example, is a former MDR member. The MDR was never banned. The parliamentarians adamantly argued that those political figures who have sought asylum/refugee status outside Rwanda have done so for personal gain rather than out of a genuine fear of persecution. Rwanda, they said, has a strong tradition of former government officials hopping on a plane to Europe or North America as soon as they are dismissed from office. This culture persists, they suggested, because the state still offers the best economic opportunities in Rwanda: removed from office, the officials are not likely to find comparable opportunities in the local private sector and thus look to go abroad to seek their fortunes. In order to be permitted to remain in a country, they seek asylum status. Citing a couple of recent examples, the parliamentarians argued that former Speaker of the Assembly Joseph Seberenzi--despite enjoying asylum outside Rwanda--regularly returns to the country to visit his family but comes via overland routes to avoid receiving Rwandan entry/exit stamps. Valens Kajeguhakwa, a former RPF deputy whom the group noted is a Tutsi himself, fled Rwanda to avoid charges of embezzling public funds.

¶9. (SBU) Commenting on allegations of irregularities during the 2003 elections, Senator Nyiramilimo acknowledged that the Liberal Party (of which she is a member) did have party workers who were detained by members of the Local Defense

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Force. But, she said, those workers were quickly released once party leaders learned of their detentions. In her opinion the 2003 elections were the first free elections in the country's history.

Parliament Finding its Footing

¶10. (SBU) While acknowledging that a lack of funding and sufficient professional staff limit parliament's ability to initiate legislation, the group stated that Rwanda's legislature is not merely a rubber stamp for the executive branch. Senator Biruta assured the A/S that parliament is free and that parliamentarians vote as individuals, not as members of a group. All legislation introduced by the executive branch is scrutinized and, at times, rejected. Biruta identified increasing parliament's research and analysis capabilities as a top priority. The parliamentarians said that President Kagame recently defended parliament to ministers who complained of being treated too harshly by its oversight committees. Biruta noted, for example, that the senate's human rights committee not only questioned relevant GOR officials about a reported secret detention center but also sent a Senator along with representatives from human rights organizations

to verify the officials, testimony. The A/S commented that the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) could be used to help strengthen the legislature,s capabilities since accounts are tailored to each country,s specific needs.

Reconciliation: A Long Road Ahead?

¶11. (U) With respect to the progress of reconciliation efforts in Rwanda, Karemera said that much progress had been made with Rwandan youth but that there is "a long road to travel for those who imbibed" the genocide ideology: many of these people have not yet changed. Nyiramilimo noted that the senate recently completed a one-year study to determine whether genocide ideology persists in Rwanda. The work--carried out by 22 academics--has not yet been released but suggests that genocide ideology is very much alive in Rwanda. The report currently is being translated into English and should be made public in the near future.

¶12. (U) Karemera closed the meeting by thanking the USG for its continued support of Rwanda,s reconstruction --singling out the US for its assistance to the gacaca process when its development had stalled--and expressed a desire for the Rwandan legislature to continue to cooperate with and learn from other democratic nations.
ARIETTI